Akosa Erinne

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AP Language and Composition

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Beyond the Moon

As I am toeing the starting line last Saturday, I am thinking, “It is 8 in the morning. I should be in bed, not out here.” The other members of the varsity cross country team and I are surrounded by hundreds of competitors, each one wearing a face that is far too eager for the struggle to come. This prevalent level of confidence is almost disconcerting, but I dismiss their beams as counterfeit and, seeking motivation, meander into a meditative mental state.

“Why do I punish myself like this? What it is that I hope to achieve, and how will running this race help me accomplish that task?”

I hear the sound of a faraway voice, but it is too distant for me to comprehend. I am oblivious to the rising tension in the air, and continue contemplating.

“What if I just forfeit? Walk away from it all? Would they­–“

The starting pistol is fired, and all hell breaks loose. My heart, mind, and soul are instantly and simultaneously ignited as I thrust myself into 5000 meters of misery. For the duration of my race, everything I considered so important only minutes before is deemphasized. My surroundings are nothing but a lengthy, continuous blur, and all sounds within my vicinity are reduced to white noise. After what seems to be an eternity, I cross the finish line with confident strides, and the sensation slowly returns to my legs. My comrades congratulate me, and I accept their words with a counterfeit smile of my own.

“Are you kidding me!?!” I think to myself. “It took me 17 minutes and 31 seconds to get here?”An unquellable storm, rivaling the Chernobyl accident in ferocity, raged deep within me, and I realized yet again why cross country is so appealing to me; the nature of the sport harmonizes with my personality.

Brian Litrell once offered his audience words of motivation, saying, “Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.” Whenever I hear this quote, I cannot help but ponder, “What if the Moon is not enough?”

I am insatiable. Most people don’t like to be described with that word because of its negative connotation, but, for better or worse, it is who I am. The fact that I will never be satisfied matches my philosophy of humanism ideally, because, in the pursuit of the unattainable, I stride closer and closer to unlocking my true potential as a student, an athlete, and a human being. Whether I’m chasing down a certain 5k time, a perfect SAT score, or a dream of a better world, being in a state of perpetual discontent serves as an infinite source of fuel for shooting the moon.